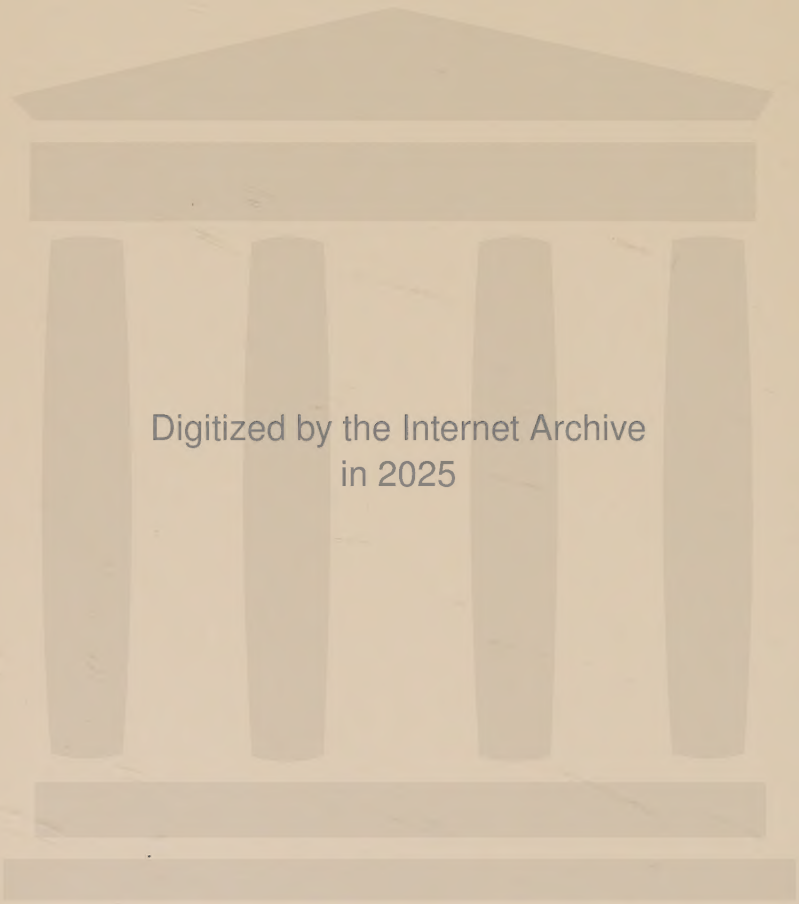
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COLLECTED SONNETS

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Books by

Edna St. Vincent Millay

THE BUCK IN THE SNOW

SECOND APRIL

THREE PLAYS

RENASCENCE

A FEW FIGS FROM THISTLES

THE HARP-WEAVER

ARIA DA CAPO

THE KING'S HENCHMAN

THE LAMP AND THE BELL

THE PRINCESS MARRIES THE PAGE

POEMS SELECTED FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

FATAL INTERVIEW

WINE FROM THESE GRAPES

CONVERSATION AT MIDNIGHT

HUNTSMAN, WHAT QUARRY?

MAKE BRIGHT THE ARROWS

COLLECTED SONNETS

Harper & Brothers
Publishers

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1941

Collected Sonnets

of

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Harper & Brothers Publishers
New York

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FOREWORD

I have omitted from this collection several pieces in sonnet form which were not designed to be read as separate sonnets, and which apart from their context would not be fully understood. From *Conversation at Midnight*—where the passages in sonnet form were written not as independent sonnets but as speeches in a play, dependent for clarity upon the matter preceding them—nothing is included here. For a similar reason I have omitted from *Huntsman, What Quarry?* the short sequence, "From a Town in a State of Siege"; and from *Make Bright the Arrows*, seven of the nine sonnets which conclude the volume.

Two sonnets, both previously published in magazine form, but neither of them, through oversight, hitherto published in any volume of my poems, are included here. The first of these, beginning with the line, "I do but ask that you be always fair," appears in this collection as the opening sonnet of the group from *A Few Figs from Thistles*; the second, beginning, "Not only love plus awful grief," is part of the *Huntsman, What Quarry?* group.

Some time ago, while looking through the pages of an old workbook, I came upon one poem which I remembered vividly: the first sonnet I ever wrote. This, although it was written as a

practice-piece, an exercise in sonnet-composition, and not intended ever to be published, I am printing in this foreword, as an object of possible curiosity and interest to readers of my *Collected Sonnets*.

I was about fifteen, I think, when I wrote it,—not very young to be trying my hand at my first sonnet. (Somewhat young, perhaps, to be burning in my lonely grate packets of letters yellow with age!) Here it is:

Old Letters

I know not why I am so loath to lay
Your yellowed leaves along the glowing log,
Unburied dead, that cling about and clog—
With indisputable, insistent say
Of the stout past's all inefficient fray—
The striving present, rising like a fog
To rust the active me, that am a cog
In the great wheel of industry today.
Yet, somehow, in this visible farewell
To the crude symbols of a simpler creed,
I find a pain that had not parallel
When passed the faith itself,—we give small heed
To incorporeal truth, let slack or swell;
But truth made tangible, is truth indeed.

The word "indisputable," as used in line four of the above, is not, I fear, an elegant attempt to stress my syllables after the

manner of Shelley, but, rather, a sturdy, whole-hearted mispronunciation.

The word "cog" at the end of line seven is not brought in just for the rhyme. This is the only part of my first sonnet which may be said to be "real," as distinct from "fanciful." That year for the first time, during the months of my summer-vacation from High School (where I had taken a course in typewriting and stenography) I had a job: I was a typist in a lawyer's office in Camden, Maine.

The phrase "let slack or swell," in the next to the last line, is not so strained and far-fetched a metaphor as it sounds: it refers to the gradual ebbing and the gradual flooding of the tide,—an expression natural enough to a girl who had lived all her life at the very tide-line of the sea.

E. ST. V. M.

Steepletop
August, 1941

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COLLECTED SONNETS

i

Thou art not lovelier than lilacs,—no,
Nor honeysuckle; thou art not more fair
Than small white single poppies,—I can bear
Thy beauty; though I bend before thee, though
From left to right, not knowing where to go,
I turn my troubled eyes, nor here nor there
Find any refuge from thee, yet I swear
So has it been with mist,—with moonlight so.
Like him who day by day unto his draught
Of delicate poison adds him one drop more
Till he may drink unharmed the death of ten,
Even so, inured to beauty, who have quaffed
Each hour more deeply than the hour before,
I drink—and live—what has destroyed some men.

ii

Time does not bring relief; you all have lied
Who told me time would ease me of my pain!
I miss him in the weeping of the rain;
I want him at the shrinking of the tide;
The old snows melt from every mountain-side,
And last year's leaves are smoke in every lane;
But last year's bitter loving must remain
Heaped on my heart, and my old thoughts abide.
There are a hundred places where I fear
To go,—so with his memory they brim.
And entering with relief some quiet place
Where never fell his foot or shone his face
I say, "There is no memory of him here!"
And so stand stricken, so remembering him.

iii

Mindful of you the sodden earth in spring,
And all the flowers that in the springtime grow;
And dusty roads, and thistles, and the slow
Rising of the round moon; all throats that sing
The summer through, and each departing wing,
And all the nests that the bared branches show;
And all winds that in any weather blow,
And all the storms that the four seasons bring.
You go no more on your exultant feet
Up paths that only mist and morning knew;
Or watch the wind, or listen to the beat
Of a bird's wings too high in air to view,—
But you were something more than young and sweet
And fair,—and the long year remembers you.

iv

Not in this chamber only at my birth—
When the long hours of that mysterious night
Were over, and the morning was in sight—
I cried, but in strange places, steppe and firth
I have not seen, through alien grief and mirth;
And never shall one room contain me quite
Who in so many rooms first saw the light,
Child of all mothers, native of the earth.
So is no warmth for me at any fire
Today, when the world's fire has burned so low;
I kneel, spending my breath in vain desire,
At that cold hearth which one time roared so strong:
And straighten back in weariness, and long
To gather up my little gods and go.

v

If I should learn, in some quite casual way,
That you were gone, not to return again—
Read from the back-page of a paper, say,
Held by a neighbor in a subway train,
How at the corner of this avenue
And such a street (so are the papers filled)
A hurrying man, who happened to be you,
At noon today had happened to be killed,
I should not cry aloud—I could not cry
Aloud, or wring my hands in such a place—
I should but watch the station lights rush by
With a more careful interest on my face;
Or raise my eyes and read with greater care
Where to store furs and how to treat the hair.

vi

Bluebeard

This door you might not open, and you did;
So enter now, and see for what slight thing
You are betrayed. . . . Here is no treasure hid,
No cauldron, no clear crystal mirroring
The sought-for Truth, no heads of women slain
For greed like yours, no writhings of distress;
But only what you see. . . . Look yet again:
An empty room, cobwebbed and comfortless.
Yet this alone out of my life I kept
Unto myself, lest any know me quite;
And you did so profane me when you crept
Unto the threshold of this room tonight
That I must never more behold your face.
This now is yours. I seek another place.

I do but ask that you be always fair,
That I for ever may continue kind;
Knowing me what I am, you should not dare
To lapse from beauty ever, nor seek to bind
My alterable mood with lesser cords:
Weeping and such soft matters but invite
To further vagrancy, and bitter words
Chafe soon to irremediable flight.
Wherefore I pray you if you love me dearly
Less dear to hold me than your own bright charms,
Whence it may fall that until death or nearly
I shall not move to struggle from your arms;
Fade if you must; I would but bid you be
Like the sweet year, doing all things graciously.

Love, though for this you riddle me with darts,
And drag me at your chariot till I die,—
Oh, heavy prince! Oh, panderer of hearts!—
Yet hear me tell how in their throats they lie
Who shout you mighty: thick about my hair,
Day in, day out, your ominous arrows purr,
Who still am free, unto no querulous care
A fool, and in no temple worshiper!
I, that have bared me to your quiver's fire,
Lifted my face into its puny rain,
Do wreathe you Impotent to Evoke Desire
As you are Powerless to Elicit Pain!
(Now will the god, for blasphemy so brave,
Punish me, surely, with the shaft I crave!)

ix

I think I should have loved you presently,
And given in earnest words I flung in jest;
And lifted honest eyes for you to see,
And caught your hand against my cheek and breast;
And all my pretty follies flung aside
That won you to me, and beneath your gaze,
Naked of reticence and shorn of pride,
Spread like a chart my little wicked ways.
I, that had been to you, had you remained,
But one more waking from a recurrent dream,
Cherish no less the certain stakes I gained,
And walk your memory's halls, austere, supreme,
A ghost in marble of a girl you knew
Who would have loved you in a day or two.

x

Oh, think not I am faithful to a vow!
Faithless am I save to love's self alone.
Were you not lovely I would leave you now:
After the feet of beauty fly my own.
Were you not still my hunger's rarest food,
And water ever to my wildest thirst,
I would desert you—think not but I would!—
And seek another as I sought you first.
But you are mobile as the veering air,
And all your charms more changeful than the tide,
Wherefore to be inconstant is no care:
I have but to continue at your side.
So wanton, light and false, my love, are you,
I am most faithless when I most am true.

xi

I shall forget you presently, my dear,
So make the most of this, your little day,
Your little month, your little half a year,
Ere I forget, or die, or move away,
And we are done forever; by and by
I shall forget you, as I said, but now,
If you entreat me with your loveliest lie
I will protest you with my favourite vow.
I would indeed that love were longer-lived,
And oaths were not so brittle as they are,
But so it is, and nature has contrived
To struggle on without a break thus far,—
Whether or not we find what we are seeking
Is idle, biologically speaking.

We talk of taxes, and I call you friend;
Well, such you are,—but well enough we know
How thick about us root, how rankly grow
Those subtle weeds no man has need to tend,
That flourish through neglect, and soon must send
Perfume too sweet upon us and overthrow
Our steady senses; how such matters go
We are aware, and how such matters end.
Yet shall be told no meagre passion here;
With lovers such as we forevermore
Isolde drinks the draught, and Guinevere
Receives the Table's ruin through her door,
Francesca, with the loud surf at her ear,
Lets fall the coloured book upon the floor.

xiii

Into the golden vessel of great song
Let us pour all our passion; breast to breast
Let other lovers lie, in love and rest;
Not we,—articulate, so, but with the tongue
Of all the world: the churning blood, the long
Shuddering quiet, the desperate hot palms pressed
Sharply together upon the escaping guest,
The common soul, unguarded, and grown strong.
Longing alone is singer to the lute;
Let still on nettles in the open sigh
The minstrel, that in slumber is as mute
As any man, and love be far and high,
That else forsakes the topmost branch, a fruit
Found on the ground by every passer-by.

xiv

Not with libations, but with shouts and laughter
We drenched the altars of Love's sacred grove,
Shaking to earth green fruits, impatient after
The launching of the coloured moths of Love.
Love's proper myrtle and his mother's zone
We bound about our irreligious brows,
And fettered him with garlands of our own,
And spread a banquet in his frugal house.
Not yet the god has spoken; but I fear
Though we should break our bodies in his flame,
And pour our blood upon his altar, here
Henceforward is a grove without a name,
A pasture to the shaggy goats of Pan,
Whence flee forever a woman and a man.

xv

Only until this cigarette is ended,
A little moment at the end of all,
While on the floor the quiet ashes fall,
And in the firelight to a lance extended,
Bizarrely with the jazzing music blended,
The broken shadow dances on the wall,
I will permit my memory to recall
The vision of you, by all my dreams attended.
And then adieu,—farewell!—the dream is done.
Yours is a face of which I can forget
The colour and the features, every one,
The words not ever, and the smiles not yet;
But in your day this moment is the sun
Upon a hill, after the sun has set.

xvi

Once more into my arid days like dew,
Like wind from an oasis, or the sound
Of cold sweet water bubbling underground,
A treacherous messenger, the thought of you
Comes to destroy me; once more I renew
Firm faith in your abundance,whom I found
Long since to be but just one other mound
Of sand, whereon no green thing ever grew.
And once again, and wiser in no wise,
I chase your coloured phantom on the air,
And sob and curse and fall and weep and rise
And stumble pitifully on to where,
Miserable and lost, with stinging eyes,
Once more I clasp,—and there is nothing there.

No rose that in a garden ever grew,
In Homer's or in Omar's or in mine,
Though buried under centuries of fine
Dead dust of roses, shut from sun and dew
Forever, and forever lost from view,
But must again in fragrance rich as wine
The grey aisles of the air incarnadine
When the old summers surge into a new.
Thus when I swear, "I love with all my heart,"
'Tis with the heart of Lilith that I swear,
'Tis with the love of Lesbia and Lucrece;
And thus as well my love must lose some part
Of what it is, had Helen been less fair,
Or perished young, or stayed at home in Greece.

xviii

When I too long have looked upon your face,
Wherein for me a brightness unobscured
Save by the mists of brightness has its place,
And terrible beauty not to be endured,
I turn away reluctant from your light,
And stand irresolute, a mind undone,
A silly, dazzled thing deprived of sight
From having looked too long upon the sun.
Then is my daily life a narrow room
In which a little while, uncertainly,
Surrounded by impenetrable gloom,
Among familiar things grown strange to me
Making my way, I pause, and feel, and hark,
Till I become accustomed to the dark.

xix

And you as well must die, belovèd dust,
And all your beauty stand you in no stead;
This flawless, vital hand, this perfect head,
This body of flame and steel, before the gust
Of Death, or under his autumnal frost,
Shall be as any leaf, be no less dead
Than the first leaf that fell,—this wonder fled,
Altered, estranged, disintegrated, lost.
Nor shall my love avail you in your hour.
In spite of all my love, you will arise
Upon that day and wander down the air
Obscurely as the unattended flower,
It mattering not how beautiful you were,
Or how belovèd above all else that dies.

XX

Let you not say of me when I am old,
In pretty worship of my withered hands
Forgetting who I am, and how the sands
Of such a life as mine run red and gold
Even to the ultimate sifting dust, "Behold,
Here walketh passionless age!"—for there expands
A curious superstition in these lands,
And by its leave some weightless tales are told.
In me no lenten wicks watch out the night;
I am the booth where Folly holds her fair;
Impious no less in ruin than in strength,
When I lie crumbled to the earth at length,
Let you not say, "Upon this reverend site
The righteous groaned and beat their breasts in prayer."

xxi

Oh, my beloved, have you thought of this:
How in the years to come unscrupulous Time,
More cruel than Death, will tear you from my kiss,
And make you old, and leave me in my prime?
How you and I, who scale together yet
A little while the sweet, immortal height
No pilgrim may remember or forget,
As sure as the world turns, some granite night
Shall lie awake and know the gracious flame
Gone out forever on the mutual stone;
And call to mind that on the day you came
I was a child, and you a hero grown?—
And the night pass, and the strange morning break
Upon our anguish for each other's sake!

As to some lovely temple, tenantless
Long since, that once was sweet with shivering brass,
Knowing well its altars ruined and the grass
Grown up between the stones, yet from excess
Of grief hard driven, or great loneliness,
The worshiper returns, and those who pass
Marvel him crying on a name that was,—
So is it now with me in my distress.
Your body was a temple to Delight;
Cold are its ashes whence the breath is fled;
Yet here one time your spirit was wont to move;
Here might I hope to find you day or night;
And here I come to look for you, my love,
Even now, foolishly, knowing you are dead.

xxiii

Cherish you then the hope I shall forget
At length, my lord, Pieria?—put away
For your so passing sake, this mouth of clay,
These mortal bones against my body set,
For all the puny fever and frail sweat
Of human love,—renounce for these, I say,
The Singing Mountain's memory, and betray
The silent lyre that hangs upon me yet?
Ah, but indeed, some day shall you awake,
Rather, from dreams of me, that at your side
So many nights, a lover and a bride,
But stern in my soul's chastity, have lain,
To walk the world forever for my sake,
And in each chamber find me gone again!

When you, that at this moment are to me
Dearer than words on paper, shall depart,
And be no more the warder of my heart,
Whereof again myself shall hold the key;
And be no more—what now you seem to be—
The sun, from which all excellences start
In a round nimbus, nor a broken dart
Of moonlight, even, splintered on the sea;
I shall remember only of this hour—
And weep somewhat, as now you see me weep—
The pathos of your love, that, like a flower,
Fearful of death yet amorous of sleep,
Droops for a moment and beholds, dismayed,
The wind whereon its petals shall be laid.

xxv

That Love at length should find me out and bring
This fierce and trivial brow unto the dust,
Is, after all, I must confess, but just;
There is a subtle beauty in this thing,
A wry perfection; wherefore now let sing
All voices how into my throat is thrust,
Unwelcome as Death's own, Love's bitter crust,
All criers proclaim it, and all steeples ring.
This being done, there let the matter rest.
What more remains is neither here nor there.
That you requite me not is plain to see;
Myself your slave herein have I confessed:
Thus far, indeed, the world may mock at me;
But if I suffer, it is my own affair.

xxvi

Love is not blind. I see with single eye
Your ugliness and other women's grace.
I know the imperfection of your face,—
The eyes too wide apart, the brow too high
For beauty. Learned from earliest youth am I
In loveliness, and cannot so erase
Its letters from my mind, that I may trace
You faultless, I must love until I die.
More subtle is the sovereignty of love:
So am I caught that when I say, "Not fair,"
'Tis but as if I said, "Not here—not there—
Not risen—not writing letters." Well I know
What is this beauty men are babbling of;
I wonder only why they prize it so.

xxvii

I know I am but summer to your heart,
And not the full four seasons of the year;
And you must welcome from another part
Such noble moods as are not mine, my dear.
No gracious weight of golden fruits to sell
Have I, nor any wise and wintry thing;
And I have loved you all too long and well
To carry still the high sweet breast of Spring.
Wherefore I say: O love, as summer goes,
I must be gone, steal forth with silent drums,
That you may hail anew the bird and rose
When I come back to you, as summer comes.
Else will you seek, at some not distant time,
Even your summer in another clime.

xxviii

I pray you if you love me, bear my joy
A little while, or let me weep your tears;
I, too, have seen the quavering Fate destroy
Your destiny's bright spinning—the dull shears
Meeting not neatly, chewing at the thread,—
Nor can you well be less aware how fine,
How staunch as wire, and how unwarranted
Endures the golden fortune that is mine.
I pray you for this day at least, my dear,
Fare by my side, that journey in the sun;
Else must I turn me from the blossoming year
And walk in grief the way that you have gone
Let us go forth together to the spring:
Love must be this, if it be anything.

xxix

Pity me not because the light of day
At close of day no longer walks the sky;
Pity me not for beauties passed away
From field and thicket as the year goes by;
Pity me not the waning of the moon,
Nor that the ebbing tide goes out to sea,
Nor that a man's desire is hushed so soon,
And you no longer look with love on me.
This have I known always: Love is no more
Than the wide blossom which the wind assails,
Than the great tide that treads the shifting shore,
Strewing fresh wreckage gathered in the gales:
Pity me that the heart is slow to learn
What the swift mind beholds at every turn.

XXX

Sometimes when I am wearied suddenly
Of all the things that are the outward you,
And my gaze wanders ere your tale is through
To webs of my own weaving, or I see
Abstractedly your hands about your knee
And wonder why I love you as I do,
Then I recall, "Yet *Sorrow* thus he drew";
Then I consider, "*Pride* thus painted he."
Oh, friend, forget not, when you fain would note
In me a beauty that was never mine,
How first you knew me in a book I wrote,
How first you loved me for a written line:
So are we bound till broken is the throat
Of Song, and Art no more leads out the Nine.

xxxi

Oh, oh, you will be sorry for that word!
Give back my book and take my kiss instead.
Was it my enemy or my friend I heard,
"What a big book for such a little head!"
Come, I will show you now my newest hat,
And you may watch me purse my mouth and prink!
Oh, I shall love you still, and all of that.
I never again shall tell you what I think.
I shall be sweet and crafty, soft and sly;
You will not catch me reading any more:
I shall be called a wife to pattern by;
And some day when you knock and push the door,
Some sane day, not too bright and not too stormy,
I shall be gone, and you may whistle for me.

xxxii

Here is a wound that never will heal, I know,
Being wrought not of a dearness and a death,
But of a love turned ashes and the breath
Gone out of beauty; never again will grow
The grass on that scarred acre, though I sow
Young seed there yearly and the sky bequeath
Its friendly weathers down, far underneath
Shall be such bitterness of an old woe.
That April should be shattered by a gust,
That August should be levelled by a rain,
I can endure, and that the lifted dust
Of man should settle to the earth again;
But that a dream can die, will be a thrust
Between my ribs forever of hot pain.

xxxiii

I shall go back again to the bleak shore
And build a little shanty on the sand,
In such a way that the extremest band
Of brittle seaweed will escape my door
But by a yard or two; and nevermore
Shall I return to take you by the hand;
I shall be gone to what I understand,
And happier than I ever was before.
The love that stood a moment in your eyes,
The words that lay a moment on your tongue,
Are one with all that in a moment dies,
A little under-said and over-sung.
But I shall find the sullen rocks and skies
Unchanged from what they were when I was young.

xxxiv

Say what you will, and scratch my heart to find
The roots of last year's roses in my breast;
I am as surely riper in my mind
As if the fruit stood in the stalls confessed.
Laugh at the unshed leaf, say what you will,
Call me in all things what I was before,
A flutterer in the wind, a woman still;
I tell you I am what I was and more.
My branches weigh me down, frost cleans the air,
My sky is black with small birds bearing south;
Say what you will, confuse me with fine care,
Put by my word as but an April truth—
Autumn is no less on me, that a rose
Hugs the brown bough and sighs before it goes.

xxxv

What's this of death, from you who never will die?
Think you the wrist that fashioned you in clay,
The thumb that set the hollow just that way
In your full throat and lidded the long eye
So roundly from the forehead, will let lie
Broken, forgotten, under foot some day
Your unimpeachable body, and so slay
The work he most had been remembered by?
I tell you this: whatever of dust to dust
Goes down, whatever of ashes may return
To its essential self in its own season,
Loveliness such as yours will not be lost,
But, cast in bronze upon his very urn,
Make known him Master, and for what good reason.

xxxvi

I see so clearly now my similar years
Repeat each other, shod in rusty black,
Like one hack following another hack
In meaningless procession, dry of tears,
Driven empty, lest the noses sharp as shears
Of gutter-urchins at a hearse's back
Should sniff a man died friendless, and attack
With silly scorn his deaf triumphant ears;
I see so clearly how my life must run
One year behind another year until
At length these bones that leap into the sun
Are lowered into the gravel, and lie still,
I would at times the funeral were done
And I abandoned on the ultimate hill.

xxxvii

Your face is like a chamber where a king
Dies of his wounds, untended and alone,
Stifling with courteous gesture the crude moan
That speaks too loud of mortal perishing,
Rising on elbow in the dark to sing
Some rhyme now out of season but well known
In days when banners in his face were blown
And every woman had a rose to fling.
I know that through your eyes which look on me
Who stand regarding you with pitiful breath,
You see beyond the moment's pause, you see
The sunny sky, the skimming bird beneath,
And, fronting on your windows hopelessly,
Black in the noon, the broad estates of Death.

The light comes back with Columbine; she brings
A touch of this, a little touch of that,
Coloured confetti, and a favour hat,
Patches, and powder, dolls that work by strings
And moons that work by switches, all the things
That please a sick man's fancy, and a flat
Spry convalescent kiss, and a small pat
Upon the pillow,—paper offerings.
The light goes out with her; the shadows sprawl.
Where she has left her fragrance like a shawl
I lie alone and pluck the counterpane,
Or on a dizzy elbow rise and hark—
And down like dominoes along the dark
Her little silly laughter spills again!

xxxix

Lord Archer, Death, whom sent you in your stead?
What faltering prentice fumbled at your bow,
That now should wander with the insanguine dead
In whom forever the bright blood must flow?
Or is it rather that impairing Time
Renders yourself so random, or so dim?
Or are you sick of shadows and would climb
A while to light, a while detaining him?
For know, this was no mortal youth, to be
Of you confounded, but a heavenly guest,
Assuming earthly garb for love of me,
And hell's demure attire for love of jest:
Bringing me asphodel and a dark feather,
He will return, and we shall laugh together!

xl

Loving you less than life, a little less
Than bitter-sweet upon a broken wall
Or brush-wood smoke in autumn, I confess
I cannot swear I love you not at all.
For there is that about you in this light—
A yellow darkness, sinister of rain—
Which sturdily recalls my stubborn sight
To dwell on you, and dwell on you again.
And I am made aware of many a week
I shall consume, remembering in what way
Your brown hair grows about your brow and cheek,
And what divine absurdities you say:
Till all the world, and I, and surely you,
Will know I love you, whether or not I do.

xli

I, being born a woman and distressed
By all the needs and notions of my kind,
Am urged by your propinquity to find
Your person fair, and feel a certain zest
To bear your body's weight upon my breast:
So subtly is the fume of life designed,
To clarify the pulse and cloud the mind,
And leave me once again undone, possessed.
Think not for this, however, the poor treason
Of my stout blood against my staggering brain,
I shall remember you with love, or season
My scorn with pity,—let me make it plain:
I find this frenzy insufficient reason
For conversation when we meet again.

xlii

What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why,
I have forgotten, and what arms have lain
Under my head till morning; but the rain
Is full of ghosts tonight, that tap and sigh
Upon the glass and listen for reply,
And in my heart there stirs a quiet pain
For unremembered lads that not again
Will turn to me at midnight with a cry.
Thus in the winter stands the lonely tree,
Nor knows what birds have vanished one by one,
Yet knows its boughs more silent than before:
I cannot say what loves have come and gone,
I only know that summer sang in me
A little while, that in me sings no more.

xliii

Still will I harvest beauty where it grows:
In coloured fungus and the spotted fog
Surprised on foods forgotten; in ditch and bog
Filmed brilliant with irregular rainbows
Of rust and oil, where half a city throws
Its empty tins; and in some spongy log
Whence headlong leaps the oozy emerald frog. . . .
And a black pupil in the green scum shows.
Her the inhabiter of divers places
Surmising at all doors, I push them all.
Oh, you that fearful of a creaking hinge
Turn back forevermore with craven faces,
I tell you Beauty bears an ultra fringe
Unguessed of you upon her gossamer shawl!

How healthily their feet upon the floor
Strike down! These are no spirits, but a band
Of children, surely, leaping hand in hand
Into the air in groups of three and four,
Wearing their silken rags as if they wore
Leaves only and light grasses, or a strand
Of black elusive seaweed oozing sand,
And running hard as if along a shore.
I know how lost forever, and at length
How still these lovely tossing limbs shall lie,
And the bright laughter and the panting breath;
And yet, before such beauty and such strength,
Once more, as always when the dance is high,
I am rebuked that I believe in death.

xlv

Euclid alone has looked on Beauty bare.
Let all who prate of Beauty hold their peace,
And lay them prone upon the earth and cease
To ponder on themselves, the while they stare
At nothing, intricately drawn nowhere
In shapes of shifting lineage; let geese
Gabble and hiss, but heroes seek release
From dusty bondage into luminous air.
O blinding hour, O holy, terrible day,
When first the shaft into his vision shone
Of light anatomized! Euclid alone
Has looked on Beauty bare. Fortunate they
Who, though once only and then but far away,
Have heard her massive sandal set on stone.

xlvi

Sonnets from an Ungrafted Tree

I

So she came back into his house again
And watched beside his bed until he died,
Loving him not at all. The winter rain
Splashed in the painted butter-tub outside,
Where once her red geraniums had stood,
Where still their rotted stalks were to be seen;
The thin log snapped; and she went out for wood,
Bareheaded, running the few steps between
The house and shed; there, from the sodden eaves
Blown back and forth on ragged ends of twine,
Saw the dejected creeping-jinny vine,
(And one, big-aproned, blithe, with stiff blue sleeves
Rolled to the shoulder that warm day in spring,
Who planted seeds, musing ahead to their far blossoming).

xlvii

II

The last white sawdust on the floor was grown
Gray as the first, so long had he been ill;
The axe was nodding in the block; fresh-blown
And foreign came the rain across the sill,
But on the roof so steadily it drummed
She could not think a time it might not be—
In hazy summer, when the hot air hummed
With mowing, and locusts rising raspingly,
When that small bird with iridescent wings
And long incredible sudden silver tongue
Had just flashed (and yet maybe not!) among
The dwarf nasturtiums—when no sagging springs
Of shower were in the whole bright sky, somehow
Upon this roof the rain would drum as it was drumming now.

III

She filled her arms with wood, and set her chin
Forward, to hold the highest stick in place,
No less afraid than she had always been
Of spiders up her arms and on her face,
But too impatient for a careful search
Or a less heavy loading, from the heap
Selecting hastily small sticks of birch,
For their curled bark, that instantly will leap
Into a blaze, nor thinking to return
Some day, distracted, as of old, to find
Smooth, heavy, round, green logs with a wet, gray rind
Only, and knotty chunks that will not burn,
(That day when dust is on the wood-box floor,
And some old catalogue, and a brown, shriveled
apple core).

IV

The white bark writhed and sputtered like a fish
Upon the coals, exuding odorous smoke.
She knelt and blew, in a surging desolate wish
For comfort; and the sleeping ashes woke
And scattered to the hearth, but no thin fire
Broke suddenly, the wood was wet with rain.
Then, softly stepping forth from her desire,
(Being mindful of like passion hurled in vain
Upon a similar task, in other days)
She thrust her breath against the stubborn coal,
Bringing to bear upon its hilt the whole
Of her still body . . . there sprang a little blaze . . .
A pack of hounds, the flame swept up the flue!—
And the blue night stood flattened against the window,
staring through.

v

A wagon stopped before the house; she heard
The heavy oilskins of the grocer's man
Slapping against his legs. Of a sudden whirred
Her heart like a frightened partridge, and she ran
And slid the bolt, leaving his entrance free;
Then in the cellar way till he was gone
Hid, breathless, praying that he might not see
The chair sway she had laid her hand upon
In passing. Sour and damp from that dark vault
Arose to her the well-remembered chill;
She saw the narrow wooden stairway still
Plunging into the earth, and the thin salt
Crusting the crocks; until she knew him far,
So stood, with listening eyes upon the empty dough-
nut jar.

VI

Then cautiously she pushed the cellar door
And stepped into the kitchen—saw the track
Of muddy rubber boots across the floor,
The many paper parcels in a stack
Upon the dresser; with accustomed care
Removed the twine and put the wrappings by,
Folded, and the bags flat, that with an air
Of ease had been whipped open skillfully,
To the gape of children. Treacherously dear
And simple was the dull, familiar task.
And so it was she came at length to ask:
How came the soda there? The sugar here?
Then the dream broke. Silent, she brought the mop,
And forced the trade-slip on the nail that held his
razor strop.

VII

One way there was of muting in the mind
A little while the ever-clamorous care;
And there was rapture, of a decent kind,
In making mean and ugly objects fair:
Soft-sooted kettle-bottoms, that had been
Time after time set in above the fire,
Faucets, and candlesticks, corroded green,
To mine again from quarry; to attire
The shelves in paper petticoats, and tack
New oilcloth in the ringed-and-rotten's place,
Polish the stove till you could see your face,
And after nightfall rear an aching back
In a changed kitchen, bright as a new pin,
An advertisement, far too fine to cook a supper in.

VIII

She let them leave their jellies at the door
And go away, reluctant, down the walk.
She heard them talking as they passed before
The blind, but could not quite make out their talk
For noise in the room—the sudden heavy fall
And roll of a charred log, and the roused shower
Of snapping sparks; then sharply from the wall
The unforgivable crowing of the hour.
One instant set ajar, her quiet ear
Was stormed and forced by the full rout of day:
The rasp of a saw, the fussy cluck and bray
Of hens, the wheeze of a pump, she needs must hear;
She inescapably must endure to feel
Across her teeth the grinding of a backing wagon wheel.

IX

Not over-kind nor over-quick in study
Nor skilled in sports nor beautiful was he,
Who had come into her life when anybody
Would have been welcome, so in need was she.
They had become acquainted in this way:
He flashed a mirror in her eyes at school;
By which he was distinguished; from that day
They went about together, as a rule.
She told, in secret and with whispering,
How he had flashed a mirror in her eyes;
And as she told, it struck her with surprise
That this was not so wonderful a thing.
But what's the odds?—It's pretty nice to know
You've got a friend to keep you company everywhere you go.

x

She had forgotten how the August night
Was level as a lake beneath the moon,
In which she swam a little, losing sight
Of shore; and how the boy, who was at noon
Simple enough, not different from the rest,
Wore now a pleasant mystery as he went,
Which seemed to her an honest enough test
Whether she loved him, and she was content.
So loud, so loud the million crickets' choir . . .
So sweet the night, so long-drawn-out and late . . .
And if the man were not her spirit's mate,
Why was her body sluggish with desire?
Stark on the open field the moonlight fell,
But the oak tree's shadow was deep and black and
secret as a well.

XI

It came into her mind, seeing how the snow
Was gone, and the brown grass exposed again,
And clothes-pins, and an apron—long ago,
In some white storm that sifted through the pane
And sent her forth reluctantly at last
To gather in, before the line gave way,
Garments, board-stiff, that galloped on the blast
Clashing like angel armies in a fray,
An apron long ago in such a night
Blown down and buried in the deepening drift,
To lie till April thawed it back to sight,
Forgotten, quaint and novel as a gift—
It struck her, as she pulled and pried and tore,
That here was spring, and the whole year to be lived
through once more.

XII

Tenderly, in those times, as though she fed
An ailing child—with sturdy propping up
Of its small, feverish body in the bed,
And steadying of its hands about the cup—
She gave her husband of her body's strength,
Thinking of men, what helpless things they were,
Until he turned and fell asleep at length,
And stealthily stirred the night and spoke to her.
Familiar, at such moments, like a friend,
Whistled far off the long, mysterious train,
And she could see in her mind's vision plain
The magic World, where cities stood on end . . .
Remote from where she lay—and yet—between,
Save for something asleep beside her, only the window screen.

XIII

From the wan dream that was her waking day,
Wherein she journeyed, borne along the ground
Without her own volition in some way,
Or fleeing, motionless, with feet fast bound,
Or running silent through a silent house
Sharply remembered from an earlier dream,
Upstairs, down other stairs, fearful to rouse,
Regarding him, the wide and empty scream
Of a strange sleeper on a malignant bed,
And all the time not certain if it were
Herself so doing or some one like to her,
From this wan dream that was her daily bread,
Sometimes, at night, incredulous, she would wake—
A child, blowing bubbles that the chairs and carpet
did not break!

XIV

She had a horror he would die at night.
And sometimes when the light began to fade
She could not keep from noticing how white
The birches looked—and then she would be afraid,
Even with a lamp, to go about the house
And lock the windows; and as night wore on
Toward morning, if a dog howled, or a mouse
Squeaked in the floor, long after it was gone
Her flesh would sit awry on her. By day
She would forget somewhat, and it would seem
A silly thing to go with just this dream
And get a neighbor to come at night and stay.
But it would strike her sometimes, making the tea:
She had kept that kettle boiling all night long, for company.

xv

There was upon the sill a pencil mark,
Vital with shadow when the sun stood still
At noon, but now, because the day was dark,
It was a pencil mark upon the sill.
And the mute clock, maintaining ever the same
Dead moment, blank and vacant of itself,
Was a pink shepherdess, a picture frame,
A shell marked Souvenir, there on the shelf.
Whence it occurred to her that he might be,
The mainspring being broken in his mind,
A clock himself, if one were so inclined,
That stood at twenty minutes after three—
The reason being for this, it might be said,
That things in death were neither clocks nor people,
but only dead.

XVI

The doctor asked her what she wanted done
With him, that could not lie there many days.
And she was shocked to see how life goes on
Even after death, in irritating ways;
And mused how if he had not died at all
'Twould have been easier—then there need not be
The stiff disorder of a funeral
Everywhere, and the hideous industry,
And crowds of people calling her by name
And questioning her, she'd never seen before,
But only watching by his bed once more
And sitting silent if a knocking came . . .
She said at length, feeling the doctor's eyes,
"I don't know what you do exactly when a person
dies."

XVII

Gazing upon him now, severe and dead,
It seemed a curious thing that she had lain
Beside him many a night in that cold bed,
And that had been which would not be again.
From his desirous body the great heat
Was gone at last, it seemed, and the taut nerves
Loosened forever. Formally the sheet
Set forth for her today those heavy curves
And lengths familiar as the bedroom door.
She was as one who enters, sly, and proud,
To where her husband speaks before a crowd,
And sees a man she never saw before—
The man who eats his victuals at her side,
Small, and absurd, and hers: for once, not hers,
unclassified.

FINIS

lxiii

Life, were thy pains as are the pains of hell,
So hardly to be borne, yet to be borne,
And all thy boughs more grim with wasp and thorn
Than armoured bough stood ever; too chill to spell
With the warm tongue, and sharp with broken shell
Thy ways, whereby in wincing haste forlorn
The desperate foot must travel, blind and torn,
Yet must I cry: So be it; it is well.
So fair to me thy vineyards, nor less fair
Than the sweet heaven my fathers hoped to gain;
So bright this earthly blossom spiked with care,
This harvest hung behind the boughs of pain,
Needs must I gather, guessing by the stain
I bleed, but know not wherefore, know not where.

lxiv

Grow not too high, grow not too far from home,
Green tree, whose roots are in the granite's face!
Taller than silver spire or golden dome
A tree may grow above its earthy place,
And taller than a cloud, but not so tall
The root may not be mother to the stem,
Lifting rich plenty, though the rivers fall,
To the cold sunny leaves to nourish them.
Have done with blossoms for a time, be bare;
Split rock; plunge downward; take heroic soil,—
Deeper than bones, no pasture for you there;
Deeper than water, deeper than gold and oil:
Earth's fiery core alone can feed the bough
That blooms between Orion and the Plough.

lxv

Not that it matters, not that my heart's cry
Is potent to deflect our common doom,
Or bind to truce in this ambiguous room
The planets of the atom as they ply;
But only to record that you and I,
Like thieves that scratch the jewels from a tomb,
Have gathered delicate love in hardy bloom
Close under Chaos,—I rise to testify.
This is my testament: that we are taken;
Our colours are as clouds before the wind;
Yet for a moment stood the foe forsaken,
Eyeing Love's favour to our helmet pinned;
Death is our master,—but his seat is shaken;
He rides victorious,—but his ranks are thinned.

lxvi

Sonnet to Gath

Country of hunchbacks! —where the strong, straight
spine,
Jeered at by crooked children, makes his way
Through by-streets at the kindest hour of day,
Till he deplore his stature, and incline
To measure manhood with a gibbous line;
Till out of loneliness, being flawed with clay,
He stoop into his neighbour's house and say,
"Your roof is low for me—the fault is mine."
Dust in an urn long since, dispersed and dead
Is great Apollo; and the happier he;
Since who amongst you all would lift a head
At a god's radiance on the mean door-tree,
Saving to run and hide your dates and bread,
And cluck your children in about your knee?

lxvii

To Inez Milholland

Read in Washington, November eighteenth, 1923, at the unveiling of a statue of three leaders in the cause of Equal Rights for Women

Upon this marble bust that is not I
Lay the round, formal wreath that is not fame;
But in the forum of my silenced cry
Root ye the living tree whose sap is flame.
I, that was proud and valiant, am no more;—
Save as a dream that wanders wide and late,
Save as a wind that rattles the stout door,
Troubling the ashes in the sheltered grate.
The stone will perish; I shall be twice dust.
Only my standard on a taken hill
Can cheat the mildew and the red-brown rust
And make immortal my adventurous will.
Even now the silk is tugging at the staff:
Take up the song; forget the epitaph.

lxviii

To Jesus on His Birthday

For this your mother sweated in the cold,
For this you bled upon the bitter tree:
A yard of tinsel ribbon bought and sold;
A paper wreath; a day at home for me.
The merry bells ring out, the people kneel;
Up goes the man of God before the crowd;
With voice of honey and with eyes of steel
He drones your humble gospel to the proud.
Nobody listens. Less than the wind that blows
Are all your words to us you died to save.
O Prince of Peace! O Sharon's dewy Rose!
How mute you lie within your vaulted grave.
The stone the angel rolled away with tears
Is back upon your mouth these thousand years.

lxix

On Hearing a Symphony of Beethoven

Sweet sounds, oh, beautiful music, do not cease!
Reject me not into the world again.
With you alone is excellence and peace,
Mankind made plausible, his purpose plain.
Enchanted in your air benign and shrewd,
With limbs a-sprawl and empty faces pale,
The spiteful and the stingy and the rude
Sleep like the scullions in the fairy-tale.
This moment is the best the world can give:
The tranquil blossom on the tortured stem.
Reject me not, sweet sounds! oh, let me live,
Till Doom espy my towers and scatter them.
A city spell-bound under the aging sun,
Music my rampart, and my only one.

lxx

Fatal Interview

I

What thing is this that, built of salt and lime
And such dry motes as in the sunbeam show,
Has power upon me that do daily climb
The dustless air?—for whom those peaks of snow
Whereup the lungs of man with borrowed breath
Go labouring to a doom I may not feel,
Are but a pearled and roseate plain beneath
My wingèd helmet and my wingèd heel.
What sweet emotions neither foe nor friend
Are these that clog my flight? what thing is this
That hastening headlong to a dusty end
Dare turn upon me these proud eyes of bliss?
Up, up, my feathers!—ere I lay you by
To journey barefoot with a mortal joy.

II

This beast that rends me in the sight of all,
This love, this longing, this oblivious thing,
That has me under as the last leaves fall,
Will glut, will sicken, will be gone by spring.
The wound will heal, the fever will abate,
The knotted hurt will slacken in the breast;
I shall forget before the flickers mate
Your look that is today my east and west.
Unscathed, however, from a claw so deep
Though I should love again I shall not go:
Along my body, waking while I sleep,
Sharp to the kiss, cold to the hand as snow,
The scar of this encounter like a sword
Will lie between me and my troubled lord.

III

No lack of counsel from the shrewd and wise
How love may be acquired and how conserved
Warrants this laying bare before your eyes
My needle to your north abruptly swerved;
If I would hold you, I must hide my fears
Lest you be wanton, lead you to believe
My compass to another quarter veers,
Little surrender, lavishly receive.
But being like my mother the brown earth
Fervent and full of gifts and free from guile,
Liefer would I you loved me for my worth,
Though you should love me but a little while,
Than for a philtre any doll can brew,—
Though thus I bound you as I long to do.

IV

Nay, learned doctor, these fine leeches fresh
From the pond's edge my cause cannot remove:
Alas, the sick disorder in my flesh
Is deeper than your skill, is very love.
And you, good friar, far liefer would I think
Upon my dear, and dream him in your place,
Than heed your *ben'cites* and heavenward sink
With empty heart and noddle full of grace.
Breathes but one mortal on the teeming globe
Could minister to my soul's or body's needs—
Physician minus physic, minus robe;
Confessor minus Latin, minus beads.
Yet should you bid me name him, I am dumb;
For though you summon him, he would not come.

v

Of all that ever in extreme disease
"Sweet Love, sweet cruel Love, have pity!" cried,
Count me the humblest, hold me least of these
That wear the red heart crumpled in the side,
In heaviest durance, dreaming or awake,
Filling the dungeon with their piteous woe;
Not that I shriek not till the dungeon shake,
"Oh, God! Oh, let me out! Oh, let me go!"
But that my chains throughout their iron length
Make such a golden clank upon my ear,
But that I would not, boasted I the strength,
Up with a terrible arm and out of here
Where thrusts my morsel daily through the bars
This tall, oblivious gaoler eyed with stars.

VI

Since I cannot persuade you from this mood
Of pale preoccupation with the dead,
Not for my comfort nor for your own good
Shift your concern to living bones instead;
Since that which Helen did and ended Troy
Is more than I can do though I be warm,
Have up your buried girls, egregious boy,
And stand with them against the unburied storm.
When you lie wasted and your blood runs thin,
And what's to do must with dispatch be done,
Call Cressid, call Elaine, call Isolt in!—
More bland the ichor of a ghost should run
Along your dubious veins than the rude sea
Of passion pounding all day long in me.

VII

Night is my sister, and how deep in love,
How drowned in love and weedily washed ashore,
There to be fretted by the drag and shove
At the tide's edge, I lie—these things and more:
Whose arm alone between me and the sand,
Whose voice alone, whose pitiful breath brought near,
Could thaw these nostrils and unlock this hand,
She could advise you, should you care to hear.
Small chance, however, in a storm so black,
A man will leave his friendly fire and snug
For a drowned woman's sake, and bring her back
To drip and scatter shells upon the rug.
No one but Night, with tears on her dark face,
Watches beside me in this windy place.

VIII

Yet in an hour to come, disdainful dust,
You shall be bowed and brought to bed with me.
While the blood roars, or when the blood is rust
About a broken engine, this shall be.
If not today, then later; if not here
On the green grass, with sighing and delight,
Then under it, all in good time, my dear,
We shall be laid together in the night.
And ruder and more violent, be assured,
Than the desirous body's heat and sweat
That shameful kiss by more than night obscured
Wherewith at length the scornfullest mouth is met.
Life has no friend; her converts late or soon
Slide back to feed the dragon with the moon.

IX

When you are dead, and your disturbing eyes
No more as now their stormy lashes lift
To lance me through—as in the morning skies
One moment, plainly visible in a rift
Of cloud, two splendid planets may appear
And purely blaze, and are at once withdrawn,
What time the watcher in desire and fear
Leans from his chilly window in the dawn—
Shall I be free, shall I be once again
As others are, and count your loss no care?
Oh, never more, till my dissolving brain
Be powerless to evoke you out of air,
Remembered morning stars, more fiercely bright
Than all the Alphas of the actual night!

x

Strange thing that I, by nature nothing prone
To fret the summer blossom on its stem,
Who know the hidden nest, but leave alone
The magic eggs, the bird that cuddles them,
Should have no peace till your bewildered heart
Hung fluttering at the window of my breast,
Till I had ravished to my bitter smart
Your kiss from the stern moment, could not rest.
"Swift wing, sweet blossom, live again in air!
Depart, poor flower; poor feathers you are free!"
Thus do I cry, being teased by shame and care
That beauty should be brought to terms by me;
Yet shamed the more that in my heart I know,
Cry as I may, I could not let you go.

XI

Not in a silver casket cool with pearls
Or rich with red corundum or with blue,
Locked, and the key withheld, as other girls
Have given their loves, I give my love to you;
Not in a lovers'-knot, not in a ring
Worked in such fashion, and the legend plain—
Semper fidelis, where a secret spring
Kennels a drop of mischief for the brain:
Love in the open hand, no thing but that,
Ungemmed, unhidden, wishing not to hurt,
As one should bring you cowslips in a hat
Swung from the hand, or apples in her skirt,
I bring you, calling out as children do:
"Look what I have!—And these are all for you."

XII

Olympian gods, mark now my bedside lamp
Blown out; and be advised too late that he
Whom you call sire is stolen into the camp
Of warring Earth, and lies abed with me.
Call out your golden hordes, the harm is done:
Enraptured in his great embrace I lie;
Shake heaven with spears, but I shall bear a son
Branded with godhead, heel and brow and thigh.
Whom think not to bedazzle or confound
With meteoric splendours or display
Of blackened moons or suns or the big sound
Of sudden thunder on a silent day;
Pain and compassion shall he know, being **mine,**—
Confusion never, that is half divine.

XIII

I said, seeing how the winter gale increased,
Even as waxed within us and grew strong
The ancient tempest of desire, "At least,
It is the season when the nights are long.
Well flown, well shattered from the summer hedge
The early sparrow and the opening flowers!—
Late climbs the sun above the southerly edge
These days, and sweet to love those added hours."
Alas, already does the dark recede,
And visible are the trees against the snow.
Oh, monstrous parting, oh, perfidious deed,
How shall I leave your side, how shall I go? . . .
Unnatural night, the shortest of the year,
Farewell! 'Tis dawn. The longest day is here.

XIV

Since of no creature living the last breath
Is twice required, or twice the ultimate pain,
Seeing how to quit your arms is very death,
'Tis likely that I shall not die again;
And likely 'tis that Time whose gross decree
Sends now the dawn to clamour at our door,
Thus having done his evil worst to me,
Will thrust me by, will harry me no more.
When you are corn and roses and at rest
I shall endure, a dense and sanguine ghost,
To haunt the scene where I was happiest,
To bend above the thing I loved the most;
And rise, and wring my hands, and steal away
As I do now, before the advancing day.

xv

My worship from this hour the Sparrow-Drawn
Alone will cherish, and her arrowy child,
Whose groves alone in the inquiring dawn
Rise tranquil, and their altars undefiled.
Seaward and shoreward smokes a plundered land
To guard whose portals was my dear employ;
Razed are its temples now; inviolate stand
Only the slopes of Venus and her boy.
How have I stripped me of immortal aid
Save theirs alone,—who could endure to see
Forsworn Aeneas with conspiring blade
Sever the ship from shore (alas for me)
And make no sign; who saw, and did not speak,
The brooch of Troilus pinned upon the Greek.

XVI

I dreamed I moved among the Elysian fields,
In converse with sweet women long since dead;
And out of blossoms which that meadow yields
I wove a garland for your living head.
Danae, that was the vessel for a day
Of golden Jove, I saw, and at her side,
Whom Jove the Bull desired and bore away,
Europa stood, and the Swan's featherless bride.
All these were mortal women, yet all these
Above the ground had had a god for guest;
Freely I walked beside them and at ease,
Addressing them, by them again addressed,
And marvelled nothing, for remembering you,
Wherefore I was among them well I knew.

XVII

Sweet love, sweet thorn, when lightly to my heart
I took your thrust, whereby I since am slain,
And lie disheveled in the grass apart,
A sodden thing bedrenched by tears and rain,
While rainy evening drips to misty night,
And misty night to cloudy morning clears,
And clouds disperse across the gathering light,
And birds grow noisy, and the sun appears—
Had I bethought me then, sweet love, sweet thorn,
How sharp an anguish even at the best,
When all's requited and the future sworn,
The happy hour can leave within the breast,
I had not so come running at the call
Of one who loves me little, if at all.

XVIII

Shall I be prisoner till my pulses stop
To hateful Love and drag his noisy chain,
And bait my need with sugared crusts that drop
From jeweled fingers neither kind nor clean?—
Mewed in an airless cavern where a toad
Would grieve to snap his gnat and lay him down,
While in the light along the rattling road
Men shout and chaff and drive their wares to town? . . .
Perfidious Prince, that keep me here confined,
Doubt not I know the letters of my doom:
How many a man has left his blood behind
To buy his exit from this mournful room
These evil stains record, these walls that rise
Carved with his torment, steamy with his sighs.

XIX

My most distinguished guest and learnèd friend,
The pallid hare that runs before the day
Having brought your earnest counsels to an end
Now have I somewhat of my own to say:
That it is folly to be sunk in love,
And madness plain to make the matter known,
These are no mysteries you are verger of;
Everyman's wisdoms these are, and my own.
If I have flung my heart unto a hound
I have done ill, it is a certain thing;
Yet breathe I freer, walk I the more sound
On my sick bones for this brave reasoning?
Soon must I say, "'Tis prowling Death I hear!"
Yet come no better off, for my quick ear.

xx

Think not, nor for a moment let your mind,
Wearied with thinking, doze upon the thought
That the work's done and the long day behind,
And beauty, since 'tis paid for, can be bought.
If in the moonlight from the silent bough
Suddenly with precision speak your name
The nightingale, be not assured that now
His wing is limed and his wild virtue tame.
Beauty beyond all feathers that have flown
Is free; you shall not hood her to your wrist,
Nor sting her eyes, nor have her for your own
In any fashion; beauty billed and kissed
Is not your turtle; tread her like a dove—
She loves you not; she never heard of love.

XXI

Gone in good sooth you are: not even in dream
You come. As if the strictures of the light,
Laid on our glances to their disesteem,
Extended even to shadows and the night;
Extended even beyond that drowsy sill
Along whose galleries open to the skies
All maskers move unchallenged and at will,
Visor in hand or hooded to the eyes.
To that pavilion the green sea in flood
Curves in, and the slow dancers dance in foam;
I find again the pink camellia-bud
On the wide step, beside a silver comb. . . .
But it is scentless; up the marble stair
I mount with pain, knowing you are not there.

XXII

Now by this moon, before this moon shall wane
I shall be dead or I shall be with you!
No moral concept can outweigh the pain
Past rack and wheel this absence puts me through;
Faith, honour, pride, endurance, what the tongues
Of tedious men will say, or what the law—
For which of these do I fill up my lungs
With brine and fire at every breath I draw?
Time, and to spare, for patience by and by,
Time to be cold and time to sleep alone;
Let me no more until the hour I die
Defraud my innocent senses of their own.
Before this moon shall darken, say of me:
She's in her grave, or where she wants to be.

XXIII

I know the face of Falsehood and her tongue
Honeyed with unction, plausible with guile,
Are dear to men, whom count me not among,
That owe their daily credit to her smile;
Such have been succoured out of great distress
By her contriving, if accounts be true:
Their deference now above the board, I guess,
Discharges what beneath the board is due.
As for myself, I'd liefer lack her aid
Than eat her presence; let this building fall:
But let me never lift my latch, afraid
To hear her simpering accents in the hall,
Nor force an entrance past mephitic airs
Of stale patchouli hanging on my stairs.

XXIV

Whereas at morning in a jeweled crown
I bit my fingers and was hard to please,
Having shook disaster till the fruit fell down
I feel tonight more happy and at ease:
Feet running in the corridors, men quick-
Buckling their sword-belts bumping down the stair,
Challenge, and rattling bridge-chain, and the click
Of hooves on pavement—this will clear the air.
Private this chamber as it has not been
In many a month of muffled hours; almost,
Lulled by the uproar, I could lie serene
And sleep, until all's won, until all's lost,
And the door's opened and the issue shown,
And I walk forth Hell's mistress . . . or my own.

xxv

Peril upon the paths of this desire
Lies like the natural darkness of the night,
For me unpeopled; let him hence retire
Whom as a child a shadow could affright;
And fortune speed him from this dubious place
Where roses blenched or blackened of their hue,
Pallid and stemless float on undulant space,
Or clustered hidden shock the hand with dew.
Whom as a child the night's obscurity
Did not alarm, let him alone remain,
Lanterned but by the longing in the eye,
And warmed but by the fever in the vein,
To lie with me, sentried from wrath and scorn
By sleepless Beauty and her polished thorn.

XXVI

Women have loved before as I love now;
At least, in lively chronicles of the past—
Of Irish waters by a Cornish prow
Or Trojan waters by a Spartan mast
Much to their cost invaded—here and there,
Hunting the amorous line, skimming the rest,
I find some woman bearing as I bear
Love like a burning city in the breast.
I think however that of all alive
I only in such utter, ancient way
Do suffer love; in me alone survive
The unregenerate passions of a day
When treacherous queens, with death upon the tread,
Heedless and wilful, took their knights to bed.

XXVII

Moon, that against the lintel of the west
Your forehead lean until the gate be swung,
Longing to leave the world and be at rest,
Being worn with faring and no longer young,
Do you recall at all the Carian hill
Where worn with loving, loving late you lay,
Halting the sun because you lingered still,
While wondering candles lit the Carian day?
Ah, if indeed this memory to your mind
Recall some sweet employment, pity me,
That with the dawn must leave my love behind,
That even now the dawn's dim herald see!
I charge you, goddess, in the name of one
You loved as well: endure, hold off the sun.

XXVIII

When we are old and these rejoicing veins
Are frosty channels to a muted stream,
And out of all our burning there remains
No feeblest spark to fire us, even in dream,
This be our solace: that it was not said
When we were young and warm and in our prime,
Upon our couch we lay as lie the dead,
Sleeping away the unreturning time.
O sweet, O heavy-lidded, O my love,
When morning strikes her spear upon the land,
And we must rise and arm us and reprove
The insolent daylight with a steady hand,
Be not discountenanced if the knowing know
We rose from rapture but an hour ago.

XXIX

Heart, have no pity on this house of bone:
Shake it with dancing, break it down with joy.
No man holds mortgage on it; it is your own;
To give, to sell at auction, to destroy.
When you are blind to moonlight on the bed,
When you are deaf to gravel on the pane,
Shall quavering caution from this house instead
Cluck forth at summer mischief in the lane?
All that delightful youth forbears to spend
Molestful age inherits, and the ground
Will have us; therefore, while we're young, my friend—
The Latin's vulgar, but the advice is sound.
Youth, have no pity; leave no farthing here
For age to invest in compromise and fear.

XXX

Love is not all: it is not meat nor drink
Nor slumber nor a roof against the rain;
Nor yet a floating spar to men that sink
And rise and sink and rise and sink again;
Love can not fill the thickened lung with breath,
Nor clean the blood, nor set the fractured bone;
Yet many a man is making friends with death
Even as I speak, for lack of love alone.
It well may be that in a difficult hour,
Pinned down by pain and moaning for release,
Or nagged by want past resolution's power,
I might be driven to sell your love for peace,
Or trade the memory of this night for food.
It well may be. I do not think I would.

XXXI

When we that wore the myrtle wear the dust,
And years of darkness cover up our eyes,
And all our arrogant laughter and sweet lust
Keep counsel with the scruples of the wise;
When boys and girls that now are in the loins
Of croaking lads, dip oar into the sea,—
And who are these that dive for copper coins?
No longer we, my love, no longer we—
Then let the fortunate breathers of the air,
When we lie speechless in the muffling mould,
Tease not our ghosts with slander, pause not there
To say that love is false and soon grows cold,
But pass in silence the mute grave of two
Who lived and died believing love was true.

XXXII

Time, that is pleased to lengthen out the day
For grieving lovers parted or denied,
And pleased to hurry the sweet hours away
From such as lie enchanted side by side,
Is not my kinsman; nay, my feudal foe
Is he that in my childhood was the thief
Of all my mother's beauty, and in woe
My father bowed, and brought our house to grief.
Thus, though he think to touch with hateful frost
Your treasured curls, and your clear forehead line,
And so persuade me from you, he has lost;
Never shall he inherit what was mine.
When Time and all his tricks have done their worst,
Still will I hold you dear, and him accurst.

XXXIII

Sorrowful dreams remembered after waking
Shadow with dolour all the candid day;
Even as I read, the silly tears out-breaking
Splash on my hands and shut the page away. . . .
Grief at the root, a dark and secret dolour,
Harder to bear than wind-and-weather grief,
Clutching the rose, draining its cheek of colour,
Drying the bud, curling the opened leaf.
Deep is the pond—although the edge be shallow,
Frank in the sun, revealing fish and stone,
Climbing ashore to turtle-head and mallow—
Black at the centre beats a heart unknown.
Desolate dreams pursue me out of sleep;
Weeping I wake; waking, I weep, I weep.

XXXIV

Most wicked words! forbear to speak them out.
Utter them not again; blaspheme no more
Against our love with maxims learned from Doubt:
Lest Death should get his foot inside the door.
We are surrounded by a hundred foes;
And he that at your bidding joins our feast,
I stake my heart upon it, is one of those,
Nor in their councils does he sit the least.
Hark not his whisper: he is Time's ally,
Kinsman to Death, and leman of Despair:
Believe that I shall love you till I die;
Believe; and thrust him forth; and arm the stair;
And top the walls with spikes and splintered glass
That he pass gutted should again he pass.

XXXV

Clearly my ruined garden as it stood
Before the frost came on it I recall—
Stiff marigolds, and what a trunk of wood
The zinnia had, that was the first to fall;
These pale and oozy stalks, these hanging leaves
Nerveless and darkened, dripping in the sun,
Cannot gainsay me, though the spirit grieves
And wrings its hands at what the frost has done.
If in a widening silence you should guess
I read the moment with recording eyes,
Taking your love and all your loveliness
Into a listening body hushed of sighs . . .
Though summer's rife and the warm rose in season,
Rebuke me not: I have a winter reason.

XXXVI

Hearing your words, and not a word among them
Tuned to my liking, on a salty day
When inland woods were pushed by winds that flung
them
Hissing to leeward like a ton of spray,
I thought how off Matinicus the tide
Came pounding in, came running through the Gut,
While from the Rock the warning whistle cried,
And children whimpered, and the doors blew shut;
There in the autumn when the men go forth,
With slapping skirts the island women stand
In gardens stripped and scattered, peering north,
With dahlia tubers dripping from the hand:
The wind of their endurance, driving south,
Flattened your words against your speaking mouth.

XXXVII

Believe, if ever the bridges of this town,
Whose towers were builded without fault or stain,
Be taken, and its battlements go down,
No mortal roof shall shelter me again;
I shall not prop a branch against a bough
To hide me from the whipping east or north,
Nor tease to flame a heap of sticks, who now
Am warmed by all the wonders of the earth.
Do you take ship unto some happier shore
In such event, and have no thought for me.
I shall remain;—to share the ruinous floor
With roofs that once were seen far out at sea;
To cheer a mouldering army on the march . . .
And beg from spectres by a broken arch.

XXXVIII

You say: "Since life is cruel enough at best;"
You say: "Considering how our love is cursed,
And housed so bleakly that the sea-gull's nest
Were better shelter, even as better nursed
Between the breaker and the stingy reeds
Ragged and coarse that hiss against the sand
The gull's brown chick, and hushed in all his needs,
Than our poor love so harried through the land—
You being too tender, even with all your scorn,
To line his cradle with the world's reproof,
And I too devious, too surrendered, born
Too far from home to hunt him even a roof
Out of the rain—" Oh, tortured voice, be still!
Spare me your premise: leave me when you will.

XXXIX

Love me no more, now let the god depart,
If love be grown so bitter to your tongue!
Here is my hand; I bid you from my heart
Fare well, fare very well, be always young.
As for myself, mine was a deeper drouth:
I drank and thirsted still; but I surmise
My kisses now are sand against your mouth,
Teeth in your palm and pennies on your eyes.
Speak but one cruel word, to shame my tears;
Go, but in going, stiffen up my back
To meet the yelping of the mustering years—
Dim, trotting shapes that seldom will attack
Two with a light who match their steps and sing:
To one alone and lost, another thing.

XL

You loved me not at all, but let it go;
I loved you more than life, but let it be.
As the more injured party, this being so,
The hour's amenities are all to me—
The choice of weapons; and I gravely choose
To let the weapons tarnish where they lie;
And spend the night in eloquent abuse
Of senators and popes and such small fry
And meet the morning standing, and at odds
With heaven and earth and hell and any fool
Who calls his soul his own, and all the gods,
And all the children getting dressed for school . . .
And you will leave me, and I shall entomb
What's cold by then in an adjoining room.

XLI

I said in the beginning, did I not?—
Prophetic of the end, though unaware
How light you took me, ignorant that you thought
I spoke to see my breath upon the air:
If you walk east at daybreak from the town
To the cliff's foot, by climbing steadily
You cling at noon whence there is no way down
But to go toppling backward to the sea.
And not for birds nor birds'-eggs, so they say,
But for a flower that in these fissures grows,
Forms have been seen to move throughout the day
Skyward; but what its name is no one knows.
'Tis said you find beside them on the sand
This flower, relinquished by the broken hand.

XLII

O ailing Love, compose your struggling wing!
Confess you mortal; be content to die.
How better dead, than be this awkward thing
Dragging in dust its feathers of the sky;
Hitching and rearing, plunging beak to loam,
Upturned, disheveled, uttering a weak sound
Less proud than of the gull that rakes the foam,
Less kind than of the hawk that scours the ground.
While yet your awful beauty, even at bay,
Beats off the impious eye, the outstretched hand,
And what your hue or fashion none can say,
Vanish, be fled, leave me a wingless land . . .
Save where one moment down the quiet tide
Fades a white swan, with a black swan beside.

XLIII

Summer, be seen no more within this wood;
Nor you, red Autumn, down its paths appear;
Let no more the false mitrewort intrude
Nor the dwarf cornel nor the gentian here;
You too be absent, unavailing Spring,
Nor let those thrushes that with pain conspire
From out this wood their wild arpeggios fling,
Shaking the nerves with memory and desire.
Only that season which is no man's friend,
You, surly Winter, in this wood be found;
Freeze up the year; with sleet these branches bend
Though rasps the locust in the fields around.
Now darken, sky! Now shrieking blizzard, blow!—
Farewell, sweet bank; be blotted out with snow.

XLIV

If to be left were to be left alone,
And lock the door and find one's self again—
Drag forth and dust Penates of one's own
That in a corner all too long have lain;
Read Brahms, read Chaucer, set the chessmen out
In classic problem, stretch the shrunken mind
Back to its stature on the rack of thought—
Loss might be said to leave its boon behind.
But fruitless conference and the interchange
With callow wits of bearded *cons* and *pros*
Enlist the neutral daylight, and derange
A will too sick to battle for repose.
Neither with you nor with myself, I spend
Loud days that have no meaning and no end.

XLV

I know my mind and I have made my choice;
Not from your temper does my doom depend;
Love me or love me not, you have no voice
In this, which is my portion to the end.
Your presence and your favours, the full part
That you could give, you now can take away:
What lies between your beauty and my heart
Not even you can trouble or betray.
Mistake me not—unto my inmost core
I do desire your kiss upon my mouth;
They have not craved a cup of water more
That bleach upon the deserts of the south;
Here might you bless me; what you cannot do
Is bow me down, who have been loved by you.

XLVI

Even in the moment of our earliest kiss,
When sighed the straitened bud into the flower,
Sat the dry seed of most unwelcome this;
And that I knew, though not the day and hour.
Too season-wise am I, being country-bred,
To tilt at autumn or defy the frost:
Snuffing the chill even as my fathers did,
I say with them, "What's out tonight is lost."
I only hoped, with the mild hope of all
Who watch the leaf take shape upon the tree,
A fairer summer and a later fall
Than in these parts a man is apt to see,
And sunny clusters ripened for the wine:
I tell you this across the blackened vine.

XLVII

Well, I have lost you; and I lost you fairly;
In my own way, and with my full consent.
Say what you will, kings in a tumbrel rarely
Went to their deaths more proud than this one went.
Some nights of apprehension and hot weeping
I will confess; but that's permitted me;
Day dried my eyes; I was not one for keeping
Rubbed in a cage a wing that would be free.
If I had loved you less or played you slyly
I might have held you for a summer more,
But at the cost of words I value highly,
And no such summer as the one before.
Should I outlive this anguish—and men do—
I shall have only good to say of you.

XLVIII

Now by the path I climbed, I journey back.
The oaks have grown; I have been long away.
Taking with me your memory and your lack
I now descend into a milder day;
Stripped of your love, unburdened of my hope,
Descend the path I mounted from the plain;
Yet steeper than I fancied seems the slope
And stonier, now that I go down again.
Warm falls the dusk; the clanking of a bell
Faintly ascends upon this heavier air;
I do recall those grassy pastures well:
In early spring they drove the cattle there.
And close at hand should be a shelter, too,
From which the mountain peaks are not in view.

XLIX

There is a well into whose bottomless eye,
Though I were flayed, I dare not lean and look,
Sweet once with mountain water, now gone dry,
Miraculously abandoned by the brook
Wherewith for years miraculously fed
It kept a constant level cold and bright,
Though summer parched the rivers in their bed;
Withdrawn these waters, vanished overnight.
There is a word I dare not speak again,
A face I never again must call to mind;
I was not craven ever nor blenched at pain,
But pain to such degree and of such kind
As I must suffer if I think of you,
Not in my senses will I undergo.

L

The heart once broken is a heart no more,
And is absolved from all a heart must be;
All that it signed or chartered heretofore
Is cancelled now, the bankrupt heart is free;
So much of duty as you may require
Of shards and dust, this and no more of pain,
This and no more of hope, remorse, desire,
The heart once broken need support again.
How simple 'tis, and what a little sound
It makes in breaking, let the world attest:
It struggles, and it fails; the world goes round,
And the moon follows it. Heart in my breast,
'Tis half a year now since you broke in two;
The world's forgotten well, if the world knew.

LI

If in the years to come you should recall,
When faint at heart or fallen on hungry days,
Or full of griefs and little if at all
From them distracted by delights or praise;
When failing powers or good opinion lost
Have bowed your neck, should you recall to mind
How of all men I honoured you the most,
Holding you noblest among mortal-kind:
Might not my love—although the curving blade
From whose wide mowing none may hope to hide,
Me long ago below the frosts had laid—
Restore you somewhat to your former pride?
Indeed I think this memory, even then,
Must raise you high among the run of men.

LII

Oh, sleep forever in the Latmian cave,
Mortal Endymion, darling of the Moon!
Her silver garments by the senseless wave
Shouldered and dropped and on the shingle strewn,
Her fluttering hand against her forehead pressed,
Her scattered looks that trouble all the sky,
Her rapid footsteps running down the west—
Of all her altered state, oblivious lie!
Whom earthen you, by deathless lips adored,
Wild-eyed and stammering to the grasses thrust,
And deep into her crystal body poured
The hot and sorrowful sweetness of the dust:
Whereof she wanders mad, being all unfit
For mortal love, that might not die of it.

FINIS

cxxii

Two Sonnets in Memory

(Nicola Sacco—Bartolomeo Vanzetti)

Executed August 23, 1927

I

As men have loved their lovers in times past
And sung their wit, their virtue and their grace,
So have we loved sweet Justice to the last,
Who now lies here in an unseemly place.
The child will quit the cradle and grow wise
And stare on beauty till his senses drown;
Yet shall be seen no more by mortal eyes
Such beauty as here walked and here went down.
Like birds that hear the winter crying plain
Her courtiers leave to seek the clement south;
Many have praised her, we alone remain
To break a fist against the lying mouth
Of any man who says this was not so:
Though she be dead now, as indeed we know.

cxxiii

II

Where can the heart be hidden in the ground
And be at peace, and be at peace forever,
Under the world, untroubled by the sound
Of mortal tears, that cease from pouring never?
Well for the heart, by stern compassion harried,
If death be deeper than the churchmen say,—
Gone from this world indeed what's graveward carried,
And laid to rest indeed what's laid away.
Anguish enough while yet the indignant breather
Have blood to spurt upon the oppressor's hand;
Who would eternal be, and hang in ether
A stuffless ghost above his struggling land,
Retching in vain to render up the groan
That is not there, being aching dust's alone?

cxxiv

Time, that renews the tissues of this frame,
That built the child and hardened the soft bone,
Taught him to wail, to blink, to walk alone,
Stare, question, wonder, give the world a name,
Forget the watery darkness whence he came,
Attends no less the boy to manhood grown,
Brings him new raiment, strips him of his own;
All skins are shed at length, remorse, even shame.
Such hope is mine, if this indeed be true,
I dread no more the first white in my hair,
Or even age itself, the easy shoe,
The cane, the wrinkled hands, the special chair:
Time, doing this to me, may alter too
My sorrow, into something I can bear.

cxxv

I too beneath your moon, almighty Sex,
Go forth at nightfall crying like a cat,
Leaving the lofty tower I laboured at
For birds to foul and boys and girls to vex
With tittering chalk; and you, and the long necks
Of neighbours sitting where their mothers sat
Are well aware of shadowy this and that
In me, that's neither noble nor complex.
Such as I am, however, I have brought
To what it is, this tower; it is my own;
Though it was reared To Beauty, it was wrought
From what I had to build with: honest bone
Is there, and anguish; pride; and burning thought;
And lust is there, and nights not spent alone.

cxxvi

Now from a stout and more imperious day
Let dead impatience arm me for the act.
We bear too much. Let the proud past gainsay
This tolerance. Now, upon the sleepy pact
That bound us two as lovers, now in the night
And ebb of love, let me with stealth proceed,
Catch the vow nodding, harden, feel no fright,
Bring forth the weapon sleekly, do the deed.
I know—and having seen, shall not deny—
This flag inverted keeps its colour still;
This moon in wane and scooped against the sky
Blazes in stern reproach. Stare back, my Will—
We can out-gaze it; we can do better yet:
We can expunge it. I will not watch it set.

cxxvii

When did I ever deny, though this was fleeting,
That this was love? When did I ever, I say,
With iron thumb put out the eyes of day
In this cold world where charity lies bleating
Under a thorn, and none to give him greeting,
And all that lights endeavour on its way
Is the teased lamp of loving, the torn ray
Of the least kind, the most clandestine meeting?
As God's my judge, I do cry holy, holy,
Upon the name of love however brief,
For want of whose ill-trimmed, aspiring wick
More days than one I have gone forward slowly
In utter dark, scuffling the drifted leaf,
Tapping the road before me with a stick.

Thou famished grave, I will not fill thee yet,
Roar though thou dost, I am too happy here;
Gnaw thine own sides, fast on; I have no fear
Of thy dark project, but my heart is set
On living—I have heroes to beget
Before I die; I will not come anear
Thy dismal jaws for many a splendid year;
Till I be old, I aim not to be eat.
I cannot starve thee out: I am thy prey
And thou shalt have me; but I dare defend
That I can stave thee off; and I dare say,
What with the life I lead, the force I spend,
I'll be but bones and jewels on that day,
And leave thee hungry even in the end.

cxxix

Now that the west is washed of clouds and clear,
The sun gone under and his beams laid by,
You, that require a quarter of the sky
To shine alone in: prick the dust, appear,
Beautiful Venus! The dense atmosphere
Cannot diffuse your rays, you blaze so high,
Lighting with loveliness a crisp and dry
Cold evening in the autumn of the year.
The pilot standing by his broken plane
In the unheard-of mountains, looks on you,
And warms his heart a moment at your light . . .
Benignant planet, sweet, familiar sight . . .
Thinking he may be found, he may again
See home, breaks the stale buttered crust in two.

CXXX

To Elinor Wylie

(In answer to a question about her)

Oh, she was beautiful in every part!—
The auburn hair that bound the subtle brain;
The lovely mouth cut clear by wit and pain,
Uttering oaths and nonsense, uttering art
In casual speech and curving at the smart
On startled ears of excellence too plain
For early morning!—*Obit.* Death from strain;
The soaring mind outstripped the tethered heart.
Yet here was one who had no need to die
To be remembered. Every word she said,
The lively malice of the hazel eye
Scanning the thumb-nail close—oh, dazzling dead,
How like a comet through the darkening sky
You raced! . . . would your return were heralded.

cxxxi

Enormous moon, that rise behind these hills
Heavy and yellow in a sky unstarred
And pale, your girth by purple fillets barred
Of drifting cloud, that as the cool sky fills
With planets and the brighter stars, distills
To thinnest vapour and floats valley-ward,
You flood with radiance all this cluttered yard,
The sagging fence, the chipping window sills.
Grateful at heart as if for my delight
You rose, I watch you through a mist of tears,
Thinking how man, who gags upon despair,
Salting his hunger with the sweat of fright
Has fed on cold indifference all these years,
Calling it kindness, calling it God's care.

Be sure my coming was a sharp offense
And trouble to my mother in her bed;
And harsh to me must be my going hence,
Though I were old and spent and better dead;
Between the awful spears of birth and death
I run a grassy gauntlet in the sun;
And curdled in me is my central pith,
Remembering there is dying to be done.
O Life, my little day, at what a cost
Have you been purchased! What a bargain's here!
(And yet, thou canny Lender, thou hast lost:
Thumb thy fat book until my debt appear:
So . . . art thou stuck? . . . thou canst not strike that
through
For the small dying that a man can do!)

cxxxiii

Now let the mouth of wailing for a time
Be shut, ye happy mourners; and return
To the marked door, the ribbon and the fern,
Without a tear. The good man in his prime,
The pretty child, the Gone—from a fair clime
Above the ashes of the solemn urn
Behold you; wherefore, then, these hearts that burn
With hot remorse, these cheeks the tears begrime?
Grief that is grief and worthy of that word
Is ours alone for whom no hope can be
That the loved eyes look down and understand.
Ye true believers, trusters in the Lord,
Today bereft, tomorrow hand in hand,
Think ye not shame to show your tears to me?

Not only love plus awful grief,
The ardent and consuming pain
Of all who loved and who remain
To tend alone the buried brief
Eternal, propping laurel-leaf
And frozen rose above the slain,—
But pity lest they die again
Makes of the mind an iron sheaf
Of bundled memories. Ah, bright ghost,
Who shadow all I have and do,
Be gracious in your turn, be gone!
Suffice it that I loved you most.
I would be rid of even you,
And see the world I look upon.

cxxxv

Czecho-Slovakia

If there were balm in Gilead, I would go
To Gilead for your wounds, unhappy land,
Gather you balsam there, and with this hand,
Made deft by pity, cleanse and bind and sew
And drench with healing, that your strength might
grow,
(Though love be outlawed, kindness contraband)
And you, O proud and felled, again might stand;
But where to look for balm, I do not know.
The oils and herbs of mercy are so few;
Honour's for sale; allegiance has its price;
The barking of a fox has bought us all;
We save our skins a craven hour or two.—
While Peter warms him in the servants' hall
The thorns are platted and the cock crows twice.

Count them unclean, these tears that turn no mill,
This salty flux of sorrow from the heart;
Count them unclean, and grant me one day still
To weep, in an avoided room apart.
I shall come forth at length with reddened lid
Transparent, and thick mouth, and take the plough . . .
That other men may hope, as I once did;
That other men may weep, as I do now.
I am beside you, I am at your back
Firing our bridges, I am in your van;
I share your march, your hunger; all I lack
Is the sure song I cannot sing, you can.
You think we build a world; I think we leave
Only these tools, wherewith to strain and grieve.

cxxxvii

Three Sonnets in Tetrameter

I

See how these masses mill and swarm
And troop and muster and assail:
God!—We could keep this planet warm
By friction, if the sun should fail.
Mercury, Saturn, Venus, Mars:
If no prow cuts your arid seas,
Then in your weightless air no wars
Explode with such catastrophes
As rock our planet all but loose
From its frayed mooring to the sun.
Law will not sanction such abuse
Forever; when the mischief's done,
Planets, rejoice, on which at night
Rains but the twelve-ton meteorite.

II

His stalk the dark delphinium
Unthorned into the tending hand
Releases . . . yet that hour will come . . .
And must, in such a spiny land.
The silky, powdery mignonette
Before these gathering dews are gone
May pierce me—does the rose regret
The day she did her armour on?
In that the foul supplants the fair,
The coarse defeats the twice-refined,
Is food for thought, but not despair:
All will be easier when the mind
To meet the brutal age has grown
An iron cortex of its own.

III

No further from me than my hand
Is China that I loved so well;
Love does not help to understand
The logic of the bursting shell.
Perfect in dream above me yet
Shines the white cone of Fuji-San;
I wake in fear, and weep and sweat . . .
Weep for Yoshida, for Japan.
Logic alone, all love laid by,
Must calm this crazed and plunging star:
Sorrowful news for such as I,
Who hoped—with men just as they are,
Sinful and loving—to secure
A human peace that might endure.

cxl

Upon this age, that never speaks its mind,
This furtive age, this age endowed with power
To wake the moon with footsteps, fit an oar
Into the rowlocks of the wind, and find
What swims before his prow, what swirls behind—
Upon this gifted age, in its dark hour,
Rains from the sky a meteoric shower
Of facts . . . they lie unquestioned, uncombined.
Wisdom enough to leech us of our ill
Is daily spun; but there exists no loom
To weave it into fabric; undefiled
Proceeds pure Science, and has her say; but still
Upon this world from the collective womb
Is spewed all day the red triumphant child.

cxli

My earnestness, which might at first offend,
Forgive me, for the duty it implies:
I am the convoy to the cloudy end
Of a most bright and regal enterprise;
Which under angry constellations, ill-
Mounted and under-rationed and unspurred,
Set forth to find if any country still
Might do obeisance to an honest word.
Duped and delivered up to rascals; bound
And bleeding, and his mouth stuffed; on his knees;
Robbed and imprisoned; and adjudged unsound;
I have beheld my master, if you please.
Forgive my earnestness, who at his side
Received his swift instructions, till he died.

cxlii

I must not die of pity; I must live;
Grow strong, not sicken; eat, digest my food,
That it may build me, and in doing good
To blood and bone, broaden the sensitive
Fastidious pale perception: we contrive
Lean comfort for the starving, who intrude
Upon them with our pots of pity; brewed
From stronger meat must be the broth we give.
Blue, bright September day, with here and there
On the green hills a maple turning red,
And white clouds racing in the windy air!—
If I would help the weak, I must be fed
In wit and purpose, pour away despair
And rinse the cup, eat happiness like bread.

cxliii

How innocent of me and my dark pain
In the clear east, unclouded save for one
Flamingo-coloured feather, combed and spun
Into fine spirals, with ephemeral stain
To dye the morning rose after the rain,
Rises the simple and majestic sun,
His azure course, well-known and often-run
With patient brightness to pursue again.
The gods are patient; they are slaves of Time
No less than we, and longer, at whose call
Must Phoebus rise and mount his dewy car,
And lift the reins and start the ancient climb;
Could we learn patience, though day-creatures all,
Our day should see us godlier than we are.

cxliv

Epitaph for the Race of Man

I

Before this cooling planet shall be cold,
Long, long before the music of the Lyre,
Like the faint roar of distant breakers rolled
On reefs unseen, when wind and flood conspire
To drive the ship inshore—long, long, I say,
Before this ominous humming hits the ear,
Earth will have come upon a stiller day,
Man and his engines be no longer here.
High on his naked rock the mountain sheep
Will stand alone against the final sky,
Drinking a wind of danger new and deep,
Staring on Vega with a piercing eye,
And gather up his slender hooves and leap
From crag to crag down Chaos, and so go by.

II

When Death was young and bleaching bones were few,
A moving hill against the risen day
The dinosaur at morning made his way,
And dropped his dung upon the blazing dew;
Trees with no name that now are agate grew
Lushly beside him in the steamy clay;
He woke and hungered, rose and stalked his prey,
And slept contented, in a world he knew.
In punctual season, with the race in mind,
His consort held aside her heavy tail,
And took the seed; and heard the seed confined
Roar in her womb; and made a nest to hold
A hatched-out conqueror . . . but to no avail:
The veined and fertile eggs are long since cold.

III

Cretaceous bird, your giant claw no lime
From bark of holly bruised or mistletoe
Could have arrested, could have held you so
Through fifty million years of jostling time;
Yet cradled with you in the catholic slime
Of the young ocean's tepid lapse and flow
Slumbered an agent, weak in embryo,
Should grip you straitly, in its sinewy prime.
What bright collision in the zodiac brews,
What mischief dimples at the planet's core
For shark, for python, for the dove that coos
Under the leaves?—what frosty fate's in store
For the warm blood of man,—man, out of ooze
But lately crawled, and climbing up the shore?

IV

O Earth, unhappy planet born to die,
Might I your scribe and your confessor be,
What wonders must you not relate to me
Of Man, who when his destiny was high
Strode like the sun into the middle sky
And shone an hour, and who so bright as he,
And like the sun went down into the sea,
Leaving no spark to be remembered by.
But no; you have not learned in all these years
To tell the leopard and the newt apart;
Man, with his singular laughter, his droll tears,
His engines and his conscience and his art,
Made but a simple sound upon your ears:
The patient beating of the animal heart.

v

When Man is gone and only gods remain
To stride the world, their mighty bodies hung
With golden shields, and golden curls outflung
Above their childish foreheads; when the plain
Round skull of Man is lifted and again
Abandoned by the ebbing wave, among
The sand and pebbles of the beach,—what tongue
Will tell the marvel of the human brain?
Heavy with music once this windy shell,
Heavy with knowledge of the clustered stars;
The one-time tenant of this draughty hall
Himself, in learned pamphlet, did foretell,
After some aeons of study jarred by wars,
This toothy gourd, this head emptied of all.

VI

See where Capella with her golden kids
Grazes the slope between the east and north:
Thus when the builders of the pyramids
Flung down their tools at nightfall and poured forth
Homeward to supper and a poor man's bed,
Shortening the road with friendly jest and slur,
The risen She-Goat showing blue and red
Climbed the clear dusk, and three stars followed her.
Safe in their linen and their spices lie
The kings of Egypt; even as long ago
Under these constellations, with long eye
And scented limbs they slept, and feared no foe.
Their will was law; their will was not to die:
And so they had their way; or nearly so.

VII

He heard the coughing tiger in the night
Push at his door; close by his quiet head
About the wattled cabin the soft tread
Of heavy feet he followed, and the slight
Sigh of the long banana leaves; in sight
At last and leaning westward overhead
The Centaur and the Cross now heralded
The sun, far off but marching, bringing light.
What time the Centaur and the Cross were spent,
Night and the beast retired into the hill,
Whereat serene and undevoured he lay,
And dozed and stretched and listened and lay still,
Breathing into his body with content
The temperate dawn before the tropic day.

VIII

Observe how Miyanoshita cracked in two
And slid into the valley; he that stood
Grinning with terror in the bamboo wood
Saw the earth heave and thrust its bowels through
The hill, and his own kitchen slide from view,
Spilling the warm bowl of his humble food
Into the lap of horror; mark how lewd
This cluttered gulf,—'twas here his paddy grew.
Dread and dismay have not encompassed him;
The calm sun sets; unhurried and aloof
Into the riven village falls the rain;
Days pass; the ashes cool; he builds again
His paper house upon oblivion's brim,
And plants the purple iris in its roof.

IX

He woke in terror to a sky more bright
Than middle day; he heard the sick earth groan,
And ran to see the lazy-smoking cone
Of the fire-mountain, friendly to his sight
As his wife's hand, gone strange and full of fright;
Over his fleeing shoulder it was shown
Rolling its pitchy lake of scalding stone
Upon his house that had no feet for flight.
Where did he weep? Where did he sit him down
And sorrow, with his head between his knees?
Where said the Race of Man, "Here let me drown"?
"Here let me die of hunger"?—"let me freeze"?
By nightfall he has built another town:
This boiling pot, this clearing in the trees.

x

The broken dike, the levee washed away,
The good fields flooded and the cattle drowned,
Estranged and treacherous all the faithful ground,
And nothing left but floating disarray
Of tree and home uprooted,—was this the day
Man dropped upon his shadow without a sound
And died, having laboured well and having found
His burden heavier than a quilt of clay?
No, no. I saw him when the sun had set
In water, leaning on his single oar
Above his garden faintly glimmering yet . . .
There bulked the plough, here washed the updrifted
weeds . . .
And scull across his roof and make for shore,
With twisted face and pocket full of seeds.

XI

Sweeter was loss than silver coins to spend,
Sweeter was famine than the belly filled;
Better than blood in the vein was the blood spilled;
Better than corn and healthy flocks to tend
And a tight roof and acres without end
Was the barn burned and the mild creatures killed,
And the back aging fast, and all to build:
For then it was, his neighbour was his friend.
Then for a moment the averted eye
Was turned upon him with benignant beam,
Defiance faltered, and derision slept;
He saw as in a not unhappy dream
The kindly heads against the horrid sky,
And scowled, and cleared his throat and spat, and
wept.

XII

Now forth to meadow as the farmer goes
With shining buckets to the milking-ground,
He meets the black ant hurrying from his mound
To milk the aphis pastured on the rose;
But no good-morrow, as you might suppose,
No nod of greeting, no perfunctory sound
Passes between them; no occasion's found
For gossip as to how the fodder grows.
In chilly autumn on the hardening road
They meet again, driving their flocks to stall,
Two herdsmen, each with winter for a goad;
They meet and pass, and never a word at all
Gives one to t'other. On the quaint abode
Of each, the evening and the first snow fall.

XIII

His heatless room the watcher of the stars
Nightly inhabits when the night is clear;
Propping his mattress on the turning sphere,
Saturn his rings or Jupiter his bars
He follows, or the fleeing moons of Mars,
Till from his ticking lens they disappear. . . .
Whereat he sighs, and yawns, and on his ear
The busy chirp of Earth remotely jars.
Peace at the void's heart through the wordless night,
A lamb cropping the awful grasses, grazed;
Earthward the trouble lies, where strikes his light
At dawn industrious Man, and unamazed
Goes forth to plough, flinging a ribald stone
At all endeavour alien to his own.

XIV

Him not the golden fang of furious heaven,
Nor whirling Aeolus on his awful wheel,
Nor foggy specter ramming the swift keel,
Nor flood, nor earthquake, nor the red tongue even
Of fire, disaster's dog—him, him bereaven
Of all save the heart's knocking, and to feel
The air upon his face: not the great heel
Of headless Force into the dust has driven.
These sunken cities, tier on tier, bespeak
How ever from the ashes with proud beak
And shining feathers did the phoenix rise,
And sail, and send the vulture from the skies . . .
That in the end returned; for Man was weak
Before the unkindness in his brother's eyes.

xv

Now sets his foot upon the eastern sill
Aldebaran, swiftly rising, mounting high,
And tracks the Pleiads down the crowded sky,
And drives his wedge into the western hill;
Now for the void sets forth, and further still,
The questioning mind of Man . . . that by and by
From the void's rim returns with swooning eye,
Having seen himself into the maelstrom spill.
O race of Adam, blench not lest you find
In the sun's bubbling bowl anonymous death,
Or lost in whistling space without a mind
To monstrous Nothing yield your little breath:
You shall achieve destruction where you stand,
In intimate conflict, at your brother's hand.

XVI

Alas for Man, so stealthily betrayed,
Bearing the bad cell in him from the start,
Pumping and feeding from his healthy heart
That wild disorder never to be stayed
When once established, destined to invade
With angry hordes the true and proper part,
Till Reason joggles in the headsman's cart,
And Mania spits from every balustrade.
Would he had searched his closet for his bane,
Where lurked the trusted ancient of his soul,
Obsequious Greed, and seen that visage plain;
Would he had whittled treason from his side
In his stout youth and bled his body whole,
Then had he died a king, or never died.

XVII

Only the diamond and the diamond's dust
Can render up the diamond unto Man;
One and invulnerable as it began
Had it endured, but for the treacherous thrust
That laid its hard heart open, as it must,
And ground it down and fitted it to span
A turbaned brow or fret an ivory fan,
Lopped of its stature, pared of its proper crust.
So Man, by all the wheels of heaven unscored,
Man, the stout ego, the exuberant mind
No edge could cleave, no acid could consume,—
Being split along the vein by his own kind,
Gives over, rolls upon the palm abhorred,
Is set in brass on the swart thumb of Doom.

XVIII

Here lies, and none to mourn him but the sea,
That falls incessant on the empty shore,
Most various Man, cut down to spring no more;
Before his prime, even in his infancy
Cut down, and all the clamour that was he,
Silenced; and all the riveted pride he wore,
A rusted iron column whose tall core
The rains have tunnelled like an aspen tree.
Man, doughty Man, what power has brought you low,
That heaven itself in arms could not persuade
To lay aside the lever and the spade
And be as dust among the dusts that blow?
Whence, whence the broadside? whose the heavy
blade? . . .
Strive not to speak, poor scattered mouth; I know.

FINIS

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